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## REVIEWS

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### KELLER'S SOCIETAL EVOLUTION <sup>1</sup>

Not many years ago American sociology was largely comprised in the writings of Ward and Giddings. Recently disciples of these two pioneers, as well as independent students, have broadened and deepened the work which they accomplished. The best contributions of the group of younger writers have been on the psychological side of sociology. Comparatively little has appeared recently upon the biological or physical aspects of the subject, if we except the excellent work done by geographers on the influence of the physical environment.

It is with special interest, therefore, that in this volume of Professor Keller's our attention is turned to another point of departure in sociology, that represented by the work of the late William G. Sumner. That Sumner never completed his work is a matter for regret. Instead of finishing the *Science of Society* he devoted himself to a preliminary study, *Folkways*, which he thought necessary as an introduction to the final work. Professor Keller is now the recognized exponent of Sumner's theories; and, altho he differs from Sumner on many details, he is in sympathy with his general point of view. *Societal Evolution*, according to its author, fits into Sumner's general scheme. In a note at the end of the volume he says: "As for the systematic application to the folkways of the central idea of Darwinian evolution, I do not believe that it occurred to Sumner to undertake it. . . . What he wanted to make clear was the origin and nature of the folkways; and then he meant to hasten back to his *Science of Society*, rewrite in the light of *Folkways* what he

<sup>1</sup> *Societal Evolution, A Study of the Evolutionary Basis of the Science of Society.* By Albert Galloway Keller. The Macmillan Company, 1915.

had already written, and complete the treatise. It is my belief that he would have been obliged to return to the topic of evolution in its relation to the folkways before he could have satisfied himself to go on with his *Science of Society*."

Professor Keller's explanation of the process of evolution differs, however, from that which Sumner would have made. He abandons the Spencerian formula and explains societal evolution in the simpler concepts of the Darwinian theory. He is correct in the assumption that more practical results will be obtained from the Darwinian than from the Spencerian formula of evolution; but he exaggerates the influence of Spencer when he says (p. 5): "The common persuasion of the social scientists is that evolution means Spencer. . . . Authors vary in their relations with him from the glad discipleship of a Fiske on through the incensed hostility of the orthodox, but they all unite in revering or assailing him as *the* exponent of evolution." The Darwinian version of evolution has also influenced many writers in the social sciences. Altho Spencer has been followed by many prominent sociologists, his influence is on the decline. The acceptance of the Darwinian point of view cannot be said to be such a reaction from the position of sociologists in general as the author seems to think, even tho it may be a reaction from Sumner.

Tho it would be a difficult matter to make a brief classification which would include all sociologists, the psychological writers may be easily distinguished from the biological ones; and *Societal Evolution* belongs clearly to the latter division. To classify it with the biological writings is not, however, a sufficient characterization of the work. There have been several kinds of biological writers; and this book almost deserves a place by itself. The first writers on the biological side were the analogists, who for lack of other material satisfied themselves with pointing out how closely society resembles something else — in this case an organism. The dangers and more particularly the limitations of this method were soon perceived, and it was generally abandoned. Another class of biological sociologists was represented by such

writers as Haycraft and Kidd. They borrowed laws of organic evolution, and applied them to human societies without sufficient evidence that the results were wholly applicable. To proceed on the supposition that principles which apply to the evolution of lower organisms will apply in an equal degree to human beings is bound to lead to serious error. Professor Keller has avoided the crudities of the earlier writers. He takes his cue from the Darwinian explanation of organic evolution, and proposes to show to what degree and in what manner its principles are applicable to the evolution of human societies.

Such a method gives promise of valuable results; and yet it is not without its dangers. Professor Keller himself fears that he will be charged with reasoning from analogy, and repudiates the charge by asserting that from a study of the social process itself he finds such phenomena existing as variation, selection, etc. I do not believe that "reasoning from analogy" is the proper criticism of Professor Keller's method. The danger lies in the fact that the investigator who follows the methods established for organic evolution will be satisfied if he finds results in the social world such as have been shown to exist in the lower organic. In other words, he tends to look for a specific thing and therefore to be satisfied if he finds that thing — *i. e.*, with incomplete results. A simple illustration may be found in the phenomenon of struggle or conflict, which is evidently present both in the lower organic life and in social life. The biologist points out that struggle gives rise to natural selection; the social scientist who follows this line of thought will find that selection results from struggle in the social sphere also. But if he is satisfied with this result, the very one which he is led to seek, he will overlook the fact that struggle in society gives rise not merely to selection, but to superiority and subordination, to division of labor, and other important phenomena.

The same criticism is applicable to the author's choice of the Darwinian terms, — variation, selection, transmission, adaptation. Something corresponding to these processes does take place in the social sphere, but that the biological

terms best describe the social processes is open to question. Bagehot, who studied the social processes directly, described them as uniformity (the cake of custom), variation, and selection; while Tarde chose the terms imitation, opposition, and adaptation, with variation as an extra-social process. The exact terms to be employed may be a matter of minor importance; but I believe we should at least distinguish those terms which describe means from those which describe ends. Imitation and transmission bring about uniformity; opposition gives rise to selection; and social selection and social adaptation are so nearly alike that it is doubtful if both terms need to be used. Perhaps the fault I have pointed out as inherent in the system is not glaring in this particular book. Yet Professor Keller shows a tendency throughout, and particularly in the chapters on variation and adaptation, to be satisfied with a demonstration that a process exists in society without analyzing its special social bearing. We can never be sure of complete results in sociological analyses until we study social laws as independent phenomena, without constant concentration on the methods and results of another science.

So much for the general scheme of the book. It will be worth while now to examine its chief conclusions. After a preliminary discussion, in which the author points out the nature of human evolution and the character of the folkways, he proceeds to the application of the Darwinian factors to human evolution.

Variations are essential and evident, says Professor Keller; but they do not extend in all directions. They are rigidly limited by the mores. Some variations are eliminated immediately, but many unfavorable variations persist for some time; for the process of selection is slower than that of variation. Variations that are selected enter into the folkways and become social.

The treatment of the subject of variation is brief and is the least satisfactory of all. The fact of variation is insisted upon, but there is little analysis of the phenomenon itself. The causes of variation and the conditions most favorable to its development, subjects of great practical interest, are

not touched upon. Is it possible that this brevity is due to the fact that biological variations are themselves shrouded in mystery and hence yield little basis for analogy? True, Professor Keller does not yield to the temptation to discourse on mutations and social ammixis; but he substitutes no purely social discussion in its place.

Selection he divides into two kinds, automatic and rational. Automatic selection is akin to natural selection. The struggle upon which it is based may be eliminative, and hence the form of selection may be as decisive as that brought about by nature. Selections in society are not always so decisive, however. The results of struggle range all the way from elimination to minor degrees of subordination, and we have the milder struggles of sub-groups within a society. "The effectiveness of natural selection varies inversely as the height of civilization," is the author's law of selection.

Rational selection is much more difficult to analyze and to evaluate. On the whole the author believes that the action of rational selection on societal forms in general is of much less importance than is usually supposed. The determination of the mores lies with the masses; and our ways of acting are usually traditional and irrational. Even the molding of the mores in a rational way through leaders in society is very limited in its scope. And yet, — we are not to lose courage. The situation is not hopeless. As a direct and constant method of determining societal forms the action of reason cannot be demonstrated; but in an indirect and roundabout manner reason rules. In that part of our group life which has to do with self-maintenance reason generally prevails. Cause and effect are more direct and evident here, and hence the utility of a new method or process in economic life is much more demonstrable than is the utility of a code of ethics or a religious belief. Having demonstrated the action of reason in the economic sphere, the author, following the theory of the economic interpretation of history, maintains that the social superstructure will conform itself to the economic foundation, and rational choice acting through economic life will indirectly affect the rest of social life.

After the denial of direct rational selection the reader will find this an astonishing conclusion. The truth or falsity of the economic interpretation of history need not here be argued. What the book undertakes to discuss is social processes. Granted that rational selections exist in the economic sphere; granted also that the social superstructure conforms in general to the economic base, — the question remains, what is the process of adaptation? The author does not explain. One would suppose it was by the “unseen hand,” or by some social force of gravitation beyond our understanding. The fact is that the social superstructure conforms to the economic basis in a very natural way. Old social forms do not seem to us desirable under new economic conditions, and other forms are selected which seem to us good. The process is the same as that of any other change in society — variation, selection, transmission, and adaptation. One cannot deny direct rational choice in the greater part of our social life and then admit its action during the process by which the secondary social forms conform to the primary. The economic basis does not act on the social superstructure except through individuals, and the adaptation of different forms of social life to each other is rational only to the extent that the choices of individuals are rational.

The first mistake made by Professor Keller in the treatment of this subject, and one which proved troublesome, was the classification of selections into automatic and rational. The degree of wisdom in selection is purely relative, and does not give the proper basis for classification. The significant fact of selections is that they are either unconscious (automatic is a good term) or made by conscious choice. We should not say that selections were of two kinds, automatic selections and wise selections; yet this is the sense of the author's classification.

A brief digression from the general line of argument is made to discuss in a very readable chapter the subject of counter-selection, that is, those conditions which produce adverse selections. The author contends that counter-selections are not independent abnormal manifestations, but have

a natural connection with societal selection. The evils of counter-selection, tho they form in a sense the penalties of progress, may be gradually reduced. In this discussion the author follows Schallmayer's outline almost exclusively. De Lapouge is not mentioned.

Transmission Professor Keller divides into two classes: from one generation to the next, and from one social group to another, — custom and mode in the words of Tarde, or tradition and convention as Ross more happily expressed it. The author makes little of the distinction, however, because the method is the same in either case. "Transmission of the mores takes place through the agency of imitation or of inculcation, through one or the other according as the initiative is taken by the receiving or the giving party respectively (p. 215)."

The last three chapters, treating of adaptation, do not extend the theory but supply further illustration. The fact of adaptation is shown by the discussion of conditions in three social groups in different stages of development — the Esquimaux society, frontier life, and modern city life. As has already been suggested, there is little to add to the theoretical discussion under the head of adaptation, if selection has been thoroughly treated.

The reader who is acquainted with sociological literature will not be impressed with the amount of new material in the book. Its value lies principally in the continuance of Sumner's plan. The work should not be mistaken for a treatise on sociology; it is rather a chapter in sociology. All sociologists will share the hope that Professor Keller will complete the work, and give us the *Science of Society* which Sumner left unfinished.

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